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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 1618
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NSC FOR MILLARD, MERKEL

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAO](#) [TI](#)

SUBJECT: TAJIKISTAN: SCA A/S BOUCHER, NSC MILLARD MEET WITH
POLITICOS AND CIVIL SOCIETY, CONDUCT FREE-WHEELING STUDENT ROUNDTABLE

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¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Please handle accordingly.
Not for public Internet.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs Richard Boucher and National Security Council Senior Director Elisabeth Millard met May 8 with Tajikistan's political party leaders, independent media representatives, and other civil-society players during an IFES-hosted meeting. The participants, exhibiting increased political maturity, noted their desire for increased - and equal - media access in the run-up to the November presidential election, U.S. support to amend the presidential election law, and greater participation for women at high levels of political life in Tajikistan. The Assistant Secretary and Senior Director also met with university students at the Dushanbe American Corner for a free-wheeling roundtable that covered topics including Iran and Iraq, the U.S. role in Central Asia, globalization, and education exchanges.
END SUMMARY.

POLITICIANS AND CIVIL SOCIETY

¶3. (U) Assistant Secretary Boucher and NSC Senior Director Millard met with the leaders of all legally registered political parties, independent mass media organizations, political scientists, and civil society organizations on May 8 prior to their meeting with President Rahmonov. The participants expressed their gratitude for the high-level visit and for meeting with them before the meeting with the president.

¶4. (SBU) The November presidential election focused the discussion. Deputy Chairman Davlatov of the ruling Peoples Democratic Party attempted a long statement during the introductions, and then sat in a bit of a snit when his set piece was politely cut short. Democratic Party Deputy Chairman Valiyev called for elections to meet international standards, changes to the election law, and for all parties to have greater access to the media. Social Democratic Party Chairman Zoyirev (former presidential legal adviser turned opposition figure), noted he had crafted amendments to the current Law on Presidential Elections that he said was supported by his party, the unregistered faction of the Socialist Party, and the Democratic Party. He announced he intends to submit the law to parliament in time for the November election. (COMMENT: Unlikely. END COMMENT.) He called for the United States to support his proposed amendments.

5, (U) The "opposition" political parties asked the Assistant Secretary to raise the need for election law reforms in his

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meetings with the president and other government officials.

¶6. (SBU) Participants requested the Assistant Secretary urge President Rahmonov to allow political parties and election candidates more access to television and radio, either through state or independent media. According to Tajik law, in the 60-day official campaign period before an election, candidates are permitted 15 minutes of airtime. Although political parties in theory have the right to access state television, this free access has never been granted since independence, they alleged. Further, no national independent television station yet exists.

¶7. (SBU) The headline news of the session was Islamic Renaissance Party Deputy Chairman and Member of Parliament Kabiri announcing his party council had just decided that it would nominate a candidate for president. (COMMENT: Based on previous conversations with him, we expect this candidate will not be Kabiri himself, but, rather, a symbolic "sacrificial

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lamb." But we'll see. END COMMENT.)

¶8. (SBU) The representative of the break-away faction of the Socialist Party intoned that his party would never, never support the other "democratic parties" in their attempt to reform the presidential election law.

¶9. (SBU) COMMENT: Many believe the government engineered the split in the Socialist Party. In any case, the Socialist Party - whether the pro-government or opposition wing - is a political non-entity. In fact, in reliable but unpublished public opinion polls, not one so-called democratic party registers more than 1.5 percent support in the electorate. END COMMENT.

¶10. (U) Rano Akhumova of the NGO Women Voters noted that although there have been great legal strides made to ensure women equal rights, more women need to have access to higher power structures, and more women should become leaders within political parties. No political parties have female leaders, although women do serve in deputy positions. She readily agreed with Boucher's assessment that empowerment of women improves basic social conditions of a country and promotes its development.

¶11. (SBU) National Democratic Institute Program Manager Parvis Kamolidinov pointed out that NDI's registration problems limit its ability to work to improve political party capacity across the board. (COMMENT: Given NDI's current Tajik-government-generated crisis, Kamolidinov's presence at this meeting - and his speaking out - was enormously brave. END COMMENT.)

¶12. (SBU) Chairman of the Association of Political Scientists Mamadaminov pointed out that civil society is growing well in urban areas, but Tajik NGOs outside the major cities face more

registration problems, because remote authorities act like "local kings." Mamadaminov called on the United States to strengthen its efforts to develop Tajik civil society and NGOs.

¶13. (SBU) The participants generally concurred that the upcoming presidential election would not be completely free and fair. Some noted that the Ambassador had frequently reminded them "Rome wasn't built in a day," and they said they fully understood building democracy is a gradual and evolutionary process. That said, they hoped the United States would continue to help move that process along faster.

STUDENT ROUNDTABLE AT THE DUSHANBE AMERICAN CORNER

¶14. (U) The Assistant Secretary, the NSC Senior Director, and Ambassador met with twenty English-speaking students at the American Corner in the Library of the National Academy of Sciences. The Assistant Secretary's opening statement emphasized the importance of Tajikistan in the region and the U.S. desire for a positive and productive relationship. In the following hour, the students asked the Assistant Secretary questions about U.S. policy in Iraq and Iran, U.S. intentions in Central Asia, globalization, and whether the U.S. promoting global democracy today isn't akin to the USSR having promoted global communism in the past - a Russian talking point.

¶15. (U) The students emphasized their keen interest for more possibilities and U.S. support to study in the United States. Assistant Secretary Boucher confided that President Rahmonov had raised the same issue in their meeting, and said he would do what he could to promote this worthy goal.

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¶16. (U) Although not shy to speak their minds, the students were not overly confrontational, and evidence real pleasure in the meeting. On Iran, especially, they raised the issues as they understood them, but even the most outspoken young man respectfully listened to Boucher's detailed replies.

¶17. (U) NOTE: Embassy Dushanbe has sent a nearly full text of this roundtable to SCA/PPD. END NOTE.

¶18. (SBU) COMMENT: At the political and civil-society meeting at IFES, we were struck by the newly sophisticated understanding (relatively speaking) expressed about democracy as a process. This represents a real step forward from several years ago when such folks expected the United States to carry their water for them and regularly demanded black and white solutions: "Stop working with the government and support us!" Likewise, we were delighted by the university students, both for their understanding of world events, despite the Russian domination of their information space, and by the relative sophistication of their views. We are deeply grateful Assistant Secretary Boucher and Senior Director Millard were willing to devote such a significant proportion of their relatively short visit in Dushanbe to public diplomacy events. These activities have a ripple effect and will make a difference. END COMMENT.

¶19. (U) The Assistant Secretary did not have an opportunity to clear this cable before departing Dushanbe.
HOAGLAND